

# The Howard Collector

*Summer 1963*



#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Aha! Or the Mystery of the Queen's Necklace* from *The Tattler*, March 1, 1923.

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*Around the Supper Table* from *The Brownwood Bulletin*, February 17, 1937.

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Volume 1, Number 4

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## EDITORIAL NOTES

The third issue of THE HOWARD COLLECTOR is completely sold out. A few copies of the first two issues are still available.

Oscar J. Friend, the agent for the Howard Estate, passed away the 19th of January. He became agent after the death of Otis A. Kline in 1946.

The American Poet awarded a three dollar prize to the best poem in each issue. "Skulls and Dust" won the award for the May 1929 issue. "Around the Supper Table" by the late James C. White was a regular column in The Brownwood Bulletin. The Daniel Baker Collegian was a paper issued by the students of Daniel Baker College, now part of Howard Payne College.

Despite a remarkable similarity in names, evidence indicates that Robert E. Ward was not a Howard pen name.

The Dennis Dorgan story mentioned in the prefatory note to the indexes in the third issue was inadvertently omitted from the "Character-Continuity Series". This information will be found under "Addenda".

# REPORT ON A WRITING MAN

BY TEVIS CLYDE SMITH

Quite a bit has been written about Robert E. Howard. One idea seems uppermost: that Bob found ready markets from the start, a fallacy refuted by a study of the Fiction Index in the Spring 1962 issue of THE HOWARD COLLECTOR, which gives publication date of "Spear and Fang", accepted by Weird Tales, as July 1925. "In the Forest of Villefere" appeared in the same magazine the following month, with an annoying wait of two-thirds of a year until "Wolfshead" was presented to the reading public by Farnsworth Wright, who printed seven other stories by Bob before new markets opened in July, 1929. 1929 actually marks the beginning of arrival, with freedom from such drudgery as a soda skeet, which had followed other employment Bob liked even less. 1929 also gave his reading public the opportunity to enjoy "The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune", probably his best prose, if such poetry can be called prose.

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More than likely it can, for prose and poetry intertwine, and all good prose is really poetry, either in imagery, or flow of words. "The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune" has both. I received intense enjoyment from my original reading, when I was introduced to the tale in manuscript form on one of my many visits to Bob. Time has not changed the story's enchantment.

My friendship with Bob began in 1923. I had acquired sufficient equipment to print a small paper. The Tattler, Brownwood High School, Volume 3, Number 7, December 22, 1922, had carried two stories by Bob. One was "'Golden Hope' Christmas", the other "West is West". If I remember correctly, Bob had entered them in a contest, receiving a ten dollar gold piece for the first, and a five dollar gold piece for the second. After our introduction, we commenced work on "Under the Great Tiger". This tale was never completed, though the main character drenched two successive issues of The All-Around Magazine in gore by permanently ending the activities of three Afghans in less than three hundred words, fair economy of language, it seems to me, if economy of language is something the reader desires. It should be mentioned that the small circle of subscribers, as well as exchanges, remained noncommittal. This had nothing to do with the abrupt end of the magazine. I simply suspended publication one hot

summer day. The small hand press, which defied my efforts to get a proper impression, and the efforts of two employees of a local newspaper as well, is still stored, as is some pied type which had been set, and used, for the last edition. Unexpired subscriptions were refunded, which brought commendation from a contributor to one amateur journal. I think he was one of those who had been reimbursed. This was evidently a new experience to him, as he stated that he had not been so fortunate on other occasions.

Retirement as editor of The All-Around Magazine did not end my publication of Bob's material, as I had the pleasure of publishing five of his poems a few years later while editor of The Daniel Baker Collegian. The Tattler also continued to include his work after he had graduated. There was no remuneration, but The Tattler offered an opportunity for parody, something Bob couldn't resist. He even parodied his own works, writing, among other things, a skit called "Wolfsdung".

Bob had, long since, returned to Cross Plains. He had come to Brownwood to complete high school, as the school in his home town had only ten grades at that time. Back home, he began to write in earnest, working harder and harder as the years went by, denying himself, as a general rule, all but the simplest pleasures, for his greatest intemp-

erance was overwork as he ground out his life for an occasional 1/2 to 1¢ a word, some of which was promised and I understand never received. There was no hope of future royalties, and there was also the goading of some who wondered why he didn't settle down to the prosaic routine of "a steady job", as though the work he was doing was not steady in itself. All the time, Bob kept repeating Kipling: "Down to Gehenna, or up to the throne, he travels the fastest who travels alone", in explaining his attitude toward marriage and his chosen vocation. He also used this engrossment as an excuse for an expressed detachment toward the Christian Faith, stating he did not know what he believed, adding that he supposed he was an agnostic, and saying that no Howard had ever had any religion after leaving the Catholic Church. Then he'd add: "I say all that, and when my time comes I'll probably die howling for a priest." I understand that he later met, and talked with, a priest on one of his trips to the Rio Grande Valley, from all accounts an interesting man, and the full impact of this acquaintance can only be guessed at, though the association was probably one of academic interest more than anything else. It is certain that the Christian attitude toward self destruction did not overcome the often expressed intention of eventual self erasurement.

As death neared for Patches, or Patch, as he

was better known, Bob's aging dog, and almost lifetime companion, Bob made the statement that he would do away with himself if it were not for his Mother. "My Father is a man, and can take care of himself, but I've got to stay on as long as my Mother is alive" is the way he explained his situation, as though duty kept him from doing away with himself, and I think that this sense of duty kept him pounding away at the typewriter when everything else would have failed. His Mother had been his companion when the family had resided in one small Texas town, reading to him at a time when he could not leave his own yard without being bullied by a gang of older boys. Let one small boy brush against a bully half again his size, and see how he fares, let alone against a pack. The Howards eventually moved on, but the time spent in the little place left its mark on Bob until the end, and was responsible for much of his bitterness. This bitterness was, at times, depressing to his companions. At other times, when in real, rare mood, he was one of the most entertaining persons one could hope to find. He could converse on just about any subject. He was equally at home in discussing Macbeth and Jack Harkaway. He had as much zest for general literature as any man I've ever known, and there was enchantment in his flow of words. In his telling characters glowed in such a way as to often make

them seem embalmed when met in their author's own words. At such times, it was an exceptional pleasure to hear him recite his verse, and the verse of other poets. His deep, booming chant would bring the words to life, complete with meaning. Or maybe he had seen a picture show, something mediocre in the way of a production: he had a way of making the mediocrity vanish with his telling. In spite of this, he would give an evaluation of what he considered to be his limitations. He complained that the words ran through his head, but didn't come out on paper like he had planned them. They dried up when he sat down at the typewriter. He felt that he was in chains. So he stated, and yet he worked furiously, and fast, at the keyboard, rarely pausing in spite of his disappointment at the fact that he lacked the golden touch, for many had it in his day, and got nice returns from printed junk.

"Shakespeare," he would say, "had perspective. That is why he is so great, why he continues to live. It is something so few have. He probably had it more than any man."

Regardless, he would always go back to the typewriter. He knew he had to work, and he hated conforming. In following the career of a freelance writer, he probably came nearer to being free of the brass collar than at anything else a man of

limited financial means could have done. Even at that, the work would become disgusting. Manuscripts, written, revised, and rewritten were returned by editors to be redone, and then sometimes rejected. This precarious living worried Dr. Howard, who suggested newspaper work, a suggestion which received a cool brushoff. Nor did he have any desire to go to New York. "I'll make the pulps, and not the slicks," he said, "and I'll make them from here in Texas. I'm going to prove that a man doesn't have to live in New York to sell his stories."

On one of our rambles, Bob told me that he planned to write a modern novel. It was to be titled "Post Oaks and Sand Roughs". He assured me that all his close acquaintances would be in the book, easy to recognize. He stated that none of us would read the book unless it was published. He told me sometime later that he had completed the manuscript, selected a publisher, and had the novel rejected. It is possible that he destroyed the work.

Bob was a bit eccentric in his dress. He would buy a new suit, selecting latest style, and quality material, then have the pants cuffed about two inches higher than commonly worn. His trousers didn't come above his shoe tops, but that was because he always wore high top shoes. He didn't want to get entangled in his trouser legs, and he

wanted the shoes to support his ankles. He was thinking of offense and defense. Style as to trouser length meant nothing to him, but public opinion entered into the picture in regard to a large black hat he had purchased on one of his trips. I think he picked it up in the lower Valley. I expressed a wish to wear it uptown while on one of my visits to his home. Wearing the hat would have been a happy jest. Bob declined. "These people around here think I'm crazy as hell, anyway," he said, "and I don't want to add to it." So we set out for town in the conventional headgear worn by those of our own age in that period of history. We simply donned our caps, and took off.

Once, when taking a trip with another friend, Bob reached into his pocket and found, to his dismay, that he had left his knife at home. They were in the Brownwood bus station at the time, San Antonio bound. Luckily, there was some time until the bus was to leave. Bob, somewhat shaken, stated that he would as soon board the bus without his britches as leave without a knife. He seemed to feel singularly naked. A sprint was made to a source of supply. A green-handled switchblade, never highly regarded by Bob because it was so quickly selected, was purchased almost as soon as shown, and hurriedly pocketed before the return sprint to the station. They got there on time. Bob's companion,

anticipating the scintillating conversation so usual in such moments of association, was in for a rude jolt. He settled back in his seat. Bob pulled the knife from his pocket, threw his left leg across his right, and began to whet his new-bought knife on his left shoe upper, at the same time addressing his remarks to the bus driver. I understand that this stropping and talking continued for most of the 192 miles into San Antonio. I do not know what they talked about, but surely the bus driver, if still alive, remembers the conversation.

At times he would meditate on some type of violent end other than self destruction, feeling that it would be his ill luck to finish off somebody in a burst of temper who had done some trivial thing to unleash the collected resentment within him. The prospect made him shudder, and he would become doubly cautious. He didn't want trouble, he'd say, stating that he was a coward, something he never proved. Proved, or not, he made the statement over and over, apparently feeling that he was white-livered if he showed less courage than Solomon Kane, for he was Solomon Kane, off paper, even more than he was Conan.

There is no doubt of the fact that Bob was fond of animals, but he hated cruelty to animals more than he loved animals themselves. He was unflinching in his opinion that all creatures deserve liberty.

He would have fitted in the Tibet of his day, a country which always fascinated him. He did not believe in destroying any living thing, seemingly including insects, yet he would eat beef and pork with gusto. He stated he was being inconsistent, adding that he could not exist on a vegetarian diet, but to accept his own evaluation, and brand him as consistently inconsistent would present an inaccurate picture, as he was consistent in his viewpoint in regard to basic matters. He rarely changed his viewpoint. I can think of one exception. He had always said that he wanted to be cremated, mentioning this desire several times, but the last time he mentioned the matter stated that burial would be satisfactory. Gone was the old thought of a modernized Viking funeral, perhaps because he felt it would cause his Father additional trouble, as the nearest places providing cremation were close to 200 miles away.

Almost twenty-seven years have passed since his death. A new generation is here to enjoy his tales and verse. Older readers still remain, to find pleasure in the adventures of Bran, Brule, Kull, Kane, Conan, Costigan and his white bulldog Mike, Breckenridge Elkins, and all the host of sorcerors, certainly among his most interesting characters. I think this interest will continue.

This much remains: this, and the recollections

of those who knew him. Many of these recollections will never be written. Some of his best friends were not writing men. Others, immersed in everyday chores, find writing distracts them from their work..... and yet, I hope that all who knew him will do something toward preserving the various bits of information which exist: his distaste for Lincoln, and his love for the Confederacy; his knowledge, from the beginning of our acquaintance, and earlier, that war between this country and Japan was inevitable; his storehouse of information on bare knuckle fighters, and those who came after ..... like the pleasure a number of us received during the Christmas Holidays in 1925 from reading **THREE ROUSING CHEERS FOR THE ROLLO BOYS**, a clever book by Corey Ford.

The best that any writer can do is bring Bob Howard to his public second hand. No man can transmit the vitality of the man: his gusto, his hates and rages, his moments of calm appraisal, his many moods ranging from depression to high spirits, his brilliance of mind, his cleverness, his keenness of wit. It would have been necessary to have known Bob to have that knowledge, to have walked and talked with him all night long on pleasant summer nights, and in wintertime when the mercury dipped toward zero, stopping on the old bridge over Adams Branch, and talking awhile

before cutting across to Battle Row, and past Brownwood's forgotten Boot Hill where Charlie Webb lies buried, and on across to the Santa Fe Depot, and over to the south part of town, or, if in Callahan County, through the narrow, sandy lanes toward the highway, out of the post oaks, eerie with their shadows as the moon hung low over East Peak. There was to be found the real Bob Howard. Those who know him from words on paper have never met him better than second best.



# SKULLS AND DUST

BY PATRICK HOWARD

The Persian slaughtered the Apis Bull;  
( Ammon-Ra is a darksome king. )  
And the brain fermented beneath his skull.  
( Egypt's curse is a deathly thing. )

He rode on the desert raider's track;  
( Ammon-Ra is a darksome king. )  
No man of his gleaming hosts came back.  
And the dust winds drifted sombre and black.  
( Egypt's curse is a deathly thing. )

The eons passed on the desert land;  
( Ammon-Ra is a darksome king. )  
And a stranger trod the shifting sand.  
( Egypt's curse is a deathly thing. )

His idle hand disturbed the dead;  
( Ammon-Ra is a darksome king. )  
Till he found Cambyses' skull of dread  
Whence the frenzied brain so long had fled,  
That once held terrible visions red.  
( Egypt's curse is a deathly thing. )

And an asp crawled from the dust inside  
( Ammon-Ra is a darksome king. )  
And the stranger fell and gibbered and died.  
( Egypt's curse is a deathly thing. )



# AHA! OR THE MYSTERY OF THE QUEEN'S NECKLACE

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

Hawkshaw, the great detective, was smoking a stogy reflectively when the Colonel burst into the room.

"Have you heard --" he began excitedly, but Hawkshaw raised his hand depreciatingly.

"My dear Colonel," he said. "You excite yourself unduly: You were about to tell me that the Queen's necklace, valued at fifteen million shillings, was stolen from her boudoir and that so far Scotland Yard has found no trace of the thief although they have ransacked London."

"You are a wonder, Hawkshaw," exclaimed the Colonel admiringly. "How did you know that?"

"Deduction, my dear Colonel," replied Hawkshaw, surreptitiously concealing a newspaper in which was a full account of the robbery.

"Have you been to the palace?" he asked.

"I have," was the reply. "And I brought the only clew to be found. This cigar stub was found just beneath the palace window."

Hawkshaw seized the stub and examined it carefully.

"Aha!" he exclaimed. "The man who stole the

necklace was a very tall, lank, gangling person, with very large feet and cross-eyed. He wears a number 5 hat."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the Colonel; "and how, may I ask, do you deduce that? How do you even know that the person who smoked that cigar stole the necklace?"

"The stub is flattened on one side. That proves that its smoker had a large foot. He stepped on it and it would take a great deal of weight to even dent a cigar like that. I know that its smoker is the thief because it is a long stub and anyone who could stand one whiff of that cigar would smoke it entirely up. He would be that kind of a man. He evidently dropped it in his haste to make his getaway."

"But that hat? And his tallness and cross-eyes?"

"Any man that would smoke a cigar like that would wear about a number 5 hat. As for the tallness and crossed-eyes I will explain later."

Just then there came a tap at the door. The Colonel opened it and an old man entered. He wore large green glasses, was a great deal stooped and had white hair and a long white beard.

"You are the famous detective?" he addressed Hawkshaw. "I believe I have a clew to this theft. I passed along the opposite side of the street about the time the robbery was supposed to have taken

place. A man jumped out of the palace window and walked rapidly up the street."

"Umhum," remarked Hawkshaw, "what kind of a man was this?"

"He was about five feet tall and weighed perhaps three hundred pounds," was the reply.

"Umhuh," commented Hawkshaw, "would you mind listening to my theory?"

"I would be delighted," answered the old man as he seated himself in the best chair.

"Well, then!" began Hawkshaw rising and walking to the middle of the room so that he could gesture without knocking the table over. "At the time the robbery was committed a man was returning home from a fishing trip on the Thames. He carried a fishing pole on his shoulder and as he walked along he looked into the windows of houses he had passed while seemingly gazing straight ahead, for he was very cross-eyed." (Here the visitor started.) Hawkshaw went on, "The gentleman at last arrived in Windsor and passing the palace saw the necklace lying on the mahogany table. The window was open and though it was high off the ground he saw a way to get it. He was (and is) a very tall man and he had a long rod and line. Standing on tiptoes he made a cast through the window as if casting for trout. He hooked the necklace at the first throw and fled, dropping his cigar

in his flight. He also stepped on the cigar. He eluded the police easily and thought to elude me by coming to me in disguise and seeking to divert suspicion in another direction."

And with that Hawkshaw leaped upon the old man and gripping him by the beard gave a terrific jerk. The old man gave a yell as he was jerked erect and yanked across the floor. Hawkshaw turned pale. He had made a mistake in identity? He placed a foot against the old gentleman's face and grasping the beard firmly in both hands gave another jerk. Something gave way and Hawkshaw and his victim sprawled on the floor, Hawkshaw holding in his hands the false beard and wig. While the impostor was trying to rise, encumbered by his long coat, the detective sprang nimbly up and with great dexterity kicked the huge green glasses from his face.

The "old man" was revealed as a tall, gangling man with huge feet and crossed-eyes!

As he rose Hawkshaw advanced toward him with a pair of handcuffs.

"You are under arrest," he said.

The man stepped back and drew a glittering butter knife from his pocket.

"I am a desperate man! Beware!" he said fiercely.

At that moment the Colonel recovered from his amazement enough to push the muzzle of a howitzer

against the villain and he was soon handcuffed.

"Call the police, Colonel," directed Hawkshaw, taking the necklace out of the fellow's pocket.

"Curses!" hissed the villain: "tricked, foiled, baffled! Curses!"

"But, Hawkshaw," asked the Colonel a few hours later, after they had collected the enormous reward that had been offered for the recovery of the necklace, "But, Hawkshaw, how did you know that was the man?"

"My dear Colonel," answered Hawkshaw as with a smile he lighted a stogy, "I smelt the fish on his hands."



## AROUND THE SUPPER TABLE

BY JAMES C. WHITE

The good that men do is oft interred with their bones, but not always. Sometimes it is preserved, to be published in a book for the pleasure and inspiration of those who follow after. When Robert E. Howard, of Cross Plains, young poet and author and former Howard Payne College student, snuffed out his own life about a year ago he left behind him more than a hundred poems he had written during the past few years. He had been quite successful in selling his poems and a number of short stories of varying types, and now an effort is to be made by his father, Dr. I. M. Howard, to edit and publish most of the poems contained in the unpublished collection.

Dr. Howard quite naturally believes his son possessed rare talent as a writer, but that conviction has been strengthened by comments made by qualified critics in the east. Farnsworth Wright, a New York magazine publisher, recently wrote: "Robert E. Howard is a genius. I have no doubt of that at all, now that I have reveled in the sweep of his imaginative verse. I read through the bale of manuscripts and feel intoxicated from a debauch of

great poetry. I use the word great with full realization of its meaning; for I think Howard's voice is not that of a minor bard, but of sheer genius."

"Many of the poems," Mr. Wright continued, "seem to have been written under the inspiration of Kipling, but I think he has excelled his teacher; and his more imaginative poems reach a height that Kipling could never climb." Otis Adelbert Kline, New York literateur, observes: "Mr. Wright is an excellent judge of literary material, and I have never known him to offer a compliment where it was not deserved." There is no reason why Central Texas cannot produce as great a poet as any other country, and it will be interesting to examine the forthcoming volume of verses by Mr. Howard.



# FUTILITY

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

Time races on and none can stay the tread,  
bridal bowers

Re-echo to the flight of bats. Their garland'd towers  
Rear like gaunt spectres 'gainst the dawning's red,  
Veiled by the fogs of time the Slayer glowers.  
Blithe Pan has passed and all the dryads fled.

We walk a dim defined and mystic vale,  
The mountains vaguely loom on either hand,  
Groping we go and often lose the trail,  
Compassed by demon shapes of Shadowland.  
On either hand we hear the breakers roar,  
The shifting grey fogs close behind, before.

Mazed by the trail, and by the whole world plan,  
Drudging and toiling, never knowing why,  
The Cosmic Jester of the gods is man,  
Philosophers are fools, priests jest and lie.  
Nothing is real. Leaves fade and song-birds fly.

Bewildered still, our plodding ways we go,  
The vagrant sport of all the winds that blow.  
And after all this toilsome fume and fret --  
What ocean lies beyond? I only know  
This Universal stage is set.  
The trail is placed and run that we must follow,  
The Destin'd trail. 'Tis none of ours to choose,  
The trail that only runs from night to night  
From out the grey dawn's cynic, and mocking, light  
Into the smoldering sun-set's crimson wallow.  
I only know that though we win, we lose.  
I only know that all conflict must cease,  
That always after war, comes, somehow, peace.

# SEA CURSE

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

And some return by the failing light  
    And some in the waking dream,  
For she hears the heels of the dripping ghosts  
    That ride the rough roofbeam.

-- Kipling.

They were the brawlers and braggarts, the loud boasters and hard drinkers, of Faring town, John Kulrek and his crony Lie-lip Canool. Many a time have I, a tousled-haired lad, stolen to the tavern door to listen to their curses, their profane arguments and wild sea songs; half fearful and half in admiration of these wild rovers. Aye, all the people of Faring town gazed on them with fear and admiration, for they were not like the rest of the Faring men; they were not content to ply their trade along the coasts and among the shark-teeth shoals. No yawls, no skiffs for them! They fared far, farther than any other man in the village, for they shipped on the great sailing-ships that went out on the white tides to brave the restless grey ocean and make ports in strange land.

Ah, I mind it was swift times in the little sea-

coast village of Faring when John Kulrek came home, with the furtive Lie-lip at his side, swaggering down the gang-plank, in his tarry sea-clothes, and the broad leather belt that held his ever-ready dagger; shouting condescending greeting to some favored acquaintance, kissing some maiden who ventured too near; then up the street, roaring some scarcely decent song of the sea. How the cringers and the idlers, the hangers-on, would swarm about the two desperate heroes, flattering and smirking, guffawing hilariously at each nasty jest. For to the tavern loafers and to some of the weaker among the straight-forward villagers, these men with their wild talk and their brutal deeds, their tales of the Seven Seas and the far countries, these men, I say, were valiant knights, nature's noblemen who dared to be men of blood and brawn.

And all feared them, so that when a man was beaten or a woman insulted, the villagers muttered -- and did nothing. And so when Moll Farrell's niece was put to shame by John Kulrek, none dared even to put into words what all thought. Moll had never married, and she and the girl lived alone in a little hut down close to the beach, so close that in high tide the waves came almost to the door.

The people of the village accounted old Moll something of a witch, and she was a grim, gaunt old dame who had little to say to anyone. But she

minded her own business, and eked out a slim living by gathering clams, and picking up bits of driftwood.

The girl was a pretty, foolish little thing, vain and easily befooled, else she had never yielded to the shark-like blandishments of John Kulrek.

I mind the day was a cold winter day with a sharp breeze out of the east when the old dame came into the village street shrieking that the girl had vanished. All scattered over the beach and back among the bleak inland hills to search for her -- all save John Kulrek and his cronies who sat in the tavern dicing and toping. All the while beyond the shoals, we heard the never-ceasing droning of the heaving, restless grey monster, and in the dim light of the ghostly dawn Moll Farrell's girl came home.

The tides bore her gently across the wet sands and laid her almost at her own door. Virgin-white she was, and her arms were folded across her still bosom; calm was her face, and the grey tides sighed about her slender limbs. Moll Farrell's eyes were stones, yet she stood above her dead girl and spoke no word till John Kulrek and his crony came reeling down from the tavern, their drinking-jacks still in their hands. Drunk was John Kulrek, and the people gave back for him, murder in their souls; so he came and laughed at Moll

Farrall across the body of her girl.

"Zounds!" swore John Kulrek; "the wench has drowned herself, Lie-lip!"

Lie-lip laughed, with the twist of his thin mouth. He always hated Moll Farrell, for it was she that had given him the name of Lie-lip.

Then John Kulrek lifted his drinking-jack, swaying on his uncertain legs. "A health to the wench's ghost!" he bellowed, while all stood aghast.

Then Moll Farrell spoke, and the words broke from her in a scream which sent ripples of cold up and down the spines of the throng.

"The curse of the Foul Fiend upon you, John Kulrek!" she screamed. "The curse of God rest upon your vile soul throughout eternity! May you gaze on sights that shall sear the eyes of you and scorch the soul of you! May you die a bloody death and writhe in hell's flames for a million and a million and yet a million years! I curse you by sea and by land, by earth and by air, by the demons of the swamplands, the fiends of the forest and the goblins of the hills! And you" -- her lean finger stabbed at Lie-lip Canool and he started backward, his face paling -- "you shall be the death of John Kulrek and he shall be the death of you! You shall bring John Kulrek to the doors of hell and John Kulrek shall bring you to the gallows-tree! I set the seal of death upon your brow, John Kulrek! You

shall live in terror and die in horror far out upon the cold grey sea! But the sea that took the soul of innocence to her bosom shall not take you, but shall fling forth your vile carcass to the sands! Aye, John Kulrek" -- and she spoke with such a terrible intensity that the drunken mockery on the man's face changed to one of swinish stupidity -- "the sea roars for the victim it will not keep! There is snow upon the hills, John Kulrek, and ere it melts your corpse will lie at my feet. And I shall spit upon it and be content."

Kulrek and his crony sailed at dawn for a long voyage, and Moll went back to her hut and her clam gathering. She seemed to grow leaner and more grim than ever and her eyes smoldered with a light not sane. The days glided by and people whispered among themselves that Moll's days were numbered, for she faded to a ghost of a woman; but she went her way, refusing all aid.

That was a short, cold summer and the snow on the barren inland hills never melted; a thing very unusual, which caused much comment among the villagers. At dusk and at dawn Moll would come up on the beach, gaze up at the snow which glittered on the hills, then out to sea with a fierce intensity in her gaze.

Then the days grew shorter, the nights longer and darker, and the cold grey tides came sweeping

along the bleak strands, bearing the rain and sleet of the sharp east breezes.

And upon a bleak day a trading-vessel sailed into the bay and anchored. And all the idlers and the wastrels flocked to the wharfs, for that was the ship upon which John Kulrek and Lie-lip Canool had sailed. Down the gang-plank came Lie-lip, more furtive than ever, but John Kulrek was not there.

To shouted queries, Canool shook his head. "Kulrek deserted ship at a port of Sumatra," said he. "He had a row with the skipper, lads; wanted me to desert, too, but no! I had to see you fine lads again, eh, boys?"

Almost cringing was Lie-lip Canool, and suddenly he recoiled as Moll Farrell came through the throng. A moment they stood eyeing each other; then Moll's grim lips bent in a terrible smile.

"There's blood on your hand, Canool!" she lashed out suddenly -- so suddenly that Lie-lip started and rubbed his right hand across his left sleeve.

"Stand aside, witch!" he snarled in sudden anger, striding through the crowd which gave back for him. His admirers followed him to the tavern.

Now, I mind that the next day was even colder; grey fogs came drifting out of the east and veiled the sea and the beaches. There would be no sailing

that day, and so all the villagers were in their snug houses or matching tales at the tavern. So it came that Joe, my friend, a lad of my own age, and I, were the ones who saw the first of the strange thing that happened.

Being harum-scarum lads of no wisdom, we were sitting in a small rowboat, floating at the end of the wharfs, each shivering and wishing the other would suggest leaving, there being no reason whatever for our being there, save that it was a good place to build air-castles undisturbed.

Suddenly Joe raised his hand. "Say," he said, "d'ye hear? Who can be out on the bay upon a day like this?"

"Nobody. What d'ye hear?"

"Oars. Or I'm a lubber. Listen."

There was no seeing anything in that fog, and I heard nothing. Yet Joe swore he did, and suddenly his face assumed a strange look.

"Somebody rowing out there, I tell you! The bay is alive with oars from the sound! A score of boats at the least! Ye dolt, can ye not hear?"

Then, as I shook my head, he leaped and began to undo the painter.

"I'm off to see. Name me liar if the bay is not full of boats, all together like a close fleet. Are you with me?"

Yes, I was with him, though I heard nothing.

Then out in the greyness we went, and the fog closed behind and before so that we drifted in a vague world of smoke, seeing naught and hearing naught. We were lost in no time, and I cursed Joe for leading us upon a wild goose chase that was like to end with our being swept out to sea. I thought of Moll Farrell's girl and shuddered.

How long we drifted I know not. Minutes faded into hours, hours into centuries. Still Joe swore he heard the oars, now close at hand, now far away, and for hours we followed them, steering our course toward the sound, as the noise grew or receded. This I later thought of, and could not understand.

Then, when my hands were so numb that I could no longer hold the oar, and the forerunning drowsiness of cold and exhaustion was stealing over me, bleak white stars broke through the fog which glided suddenly away, fading like a ghost of smoke, and we found ourselves afloat just outside the mouth of the bay. The waters lay smooth as a pond, all dark green and silver in the starlight, and the cold came crisper than ever. I was swinging the boat about, to put back into the bay, when Joe gave a shout, and for the first time I heard the clack of oar-locks. I glanced over my shoulder and my blood went cold.

A great beaked prow loomed above us, a weird, unfamiliar shape against the stars, and as I caught

my breath, sheered sharply and swept by us, with a curious swishing I never heard any other craft make. Joe screamed and backed oars frantically, and the boat walled out of the way just in time; for though the prow missed us, still otherwise we had died. For from the sides of the ship stood long oars, bank upon bank which swept her along. Though I had never seen such a craft, I knew her for a galley. But what was she doing upon our coasts? They said, the far-farers, that such ships were still in use among the heathens of Barbary; but it was many a long, heaving mile to Barbary, and even so she did not resemble the ships described by those who had sailed far.

We started in pursuit, and this was strange, for though the waters broke about her prow, and she seemed fairly to fly through the waves, yet she was making little speed, and it was no time before we caught up with her. Making our painter fast to a chain far back beyond the reach of the swishing oars, we hailed those on deck. But there came no answer, and at last, conquering our fears, we clambered up the chain and found ourselves upon the strangest deck man has trod for many a long, roaring century.

"This is no Barbary rover!" muttered Joe fearlessly. "Look, how old it seems! Almost ready to fall to pieces. Why, 'tis fairly rotten!"

There was no one on deck, no one at the long sweep with which the craft was steered. We stole to the hold and looked down the stair. Then and there, if ever men were on the verge of insanity, it was we. For there were rowers there, it is true; they sat upon the rowers' benches and drove the creaking oars through the grey waters. And they that rowed were skeletons!

Shrieking, we plunged across the deck, to fling ourselves into the sea. But at the rail I tripped upon something and fell headlong, and as I lay, I saw a thing which vanquished my fear of the horrors below for an instant. The thing upon which I had tripped was a human body, and in the dim grey light that was beginning to steal across the eastern waves I saw a dagger hilt standing up between his shoulders. Joe was at the rail, urging me to haste, and together we slid down the chain and cut the painter.

Then we stood off into the bay. Straight on kept the grim galley, and we followed, slowly, wondering. She seemed to be heading straight for the beach beside the wharfs, and as we approached, we saw the wharfs thronged with people. They had missed us, no doubt, and now they stood, there in the early dawn light, struck dumb by the apparition which had come up out the night and the grim ocean.

Straight on swept the galley, her oars a-swish; then ere she reached the shallow water -- crash!

-- a terrific reverberation shook the bay. Before our eyes the grim craft seemed to melt away; then she vanished, and the green waters seethed where she had ridden, but there floated no driftwood there, nor did there ever float any ashore. Aye, something floated ashore, but it was grim driftwood!

We made the landing amid a hum of excited conversation that stopped suddenly. Moll Farrell stood before her hut, limned gauntly against the ghostly dawn, her lean hand pointing seaward. And across the sighing wet sands, borne by the grey tide, something came floating; something that the waves dropped at Moll Farrell's feet. And there looked up at us, as we crowded about, a pair of unseeing eyes set in a still, white face. John Kulrek had come home.

Still and grim he lay, rocked by the tide, and as he lurched sideways, all saw the dagger hilt that stood from his back -- the dagger all of us had seen a thousand times at the belt of Lie-lip Canool.

"Aye, I killed him!" came Canool's shriek, as he writhed and groveled before our gaze. "At sea on a still night in a drunken brawl I slew him and hurled him overboard! And from the far seas he has followed me" -- his voice sank to a hideous whisper -- "because -- of -- the -- curse -- the -- sea -- would -- not -- keep -- his -- body!"

And the wretch sank down, trembling, the shadow of the gallows already in his eyes.

"Aye!" Strong, deep and exultant was Moll Farrell's voice. "From the hell of lost craft Satan sent a ship of bygone ages! A ship red with gore and stained with the memory of horrid crimes! None other would bear such a vile carcass! The sea has taken vengeance and has given me mine. See now, how I spit upon the face of John Kulrek."

And with a ghastly laugh, she pitched forward, the blood starting to her lips. And the sun came up across the restless sea.



ANNOUNCING.....

THE DARK MAN AND OTHERS, by Robert E. Howard, Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin, 1963.

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DENNIS DORGAN

*Alleys of Darkness*







All fled — all done, so lift me on the pyre;  
The Feast is over and the lamps expire.

